



January 11, 2010

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
**Contact: Chris Taylor**  
**202.434.8041**

**NASTAD Calls for Increased Federal Funding and Leadership in Response to Institute of Medicine Report on Hepatitis and Liver Cancer**

**Washington, DC** – The National Alliance of State and Territorial AIDS Directors (NASTAD) applauds the Institute of Medicine (IOM) report [\*"Hepatitis and Liver Cancer – A National Strategy for Prevention and Control of Hepatitis B and C"\*](#) for its decisive assessment of the viral hepatitis crisis in the United States (U.S.). The report highlights a troubling lack of knowledge among health-care and social-service providers, at-risk populations, the general public and policy makers about the devastating impact of viral hepatitis. The report concludes that inadequate public funding for viral hepatitis prevention, control and surveillance programs is an apparent cause.

"It is imperative that the U.S. address the viral hepatitis epidemics that impact over five million Americans," said NASTAD Executive Director Julie Scofield. "Hepatitis B and C have never been given adequate attention by policy makers and the health system overall; this indifference has resulted in millions of dollars in unnecessary medical expenses and avoidable morbidity and mortality."

The IOM report estimates that in the next 10 years, about 150,000 Americans will die from liver cancer and related complications caused by these preventable diseases. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates that 5.3 million Americans are chronically infected with hepatitis B and C and roughly three-fourths are unaware of their infection. Because the U.S. lacks an adequate surveillance system to collect viral hepatitis data, these estimates are believed to be a significant underestimate of the true impact of these epidemics. "Surveillance forms the foundation for public health action by measuring and describing the extent of the problem. The IOM report calls for the support of a national system to conduct core hepatitis surveillance. This system does not currently exist," said Randy

Mayer, Chief, Bureau of HIV, STD, and Hepatitis, Iowa Department of Public Health and member of the IOM committee.

Without adequate funding and a meaningful commitment by the U.S. government, expert estimates indicate that the domestic viral hepatitis epidemics will increase costs to private and public insurers, including Medicare and Medicaid, by billions of dollars and account for additional billions lost due to decreased productivity from the millions of American workers who suffer from chronic hepatitis B and C.

Dan Church, Adult Viral Hepatitis Prevention Coordinator for the Commonwealth of Massachusetts and an IOM committee member notes, "Health departments struggle to provide education and services to address these epidemics due to a lack of resources. The IOM report calls for CDC and other federal partners to work with stakeholders to develop such programs, which are greatly needed throughout the U.S." The CDC's Division of Viral Hepatitis (DVH) currently receives only \$19.3 million each year to fight viral hepatitis in the U.S.; roughly \$5 million of its small budget is used to fund one person in each state to oversee the prevention of viral hepatitis.

The report outlines 22 recommendations to better prevent and control hepatitis B and C. Many are directed at the CDC and state and local health departments. "Unfortunately, due to lack of federal leadership, inadequate funding, and restrictive policies, the expertise of public health programs in responding to the viral hepatitis epidemics has not been fully utilized," said Scofield. "We call upon Congress and the Administration to put into action the recommendations in this report and increase public resources allocated to viral hepatitis prevention, control and surveillance programs." Scofield noted.

Founded in 1992, NASTAD is a nonprofit national association of state and territorial health department HIV/AIDS program directors who have programmatic responsibility for administering HIV/AIDS and viral hepatitis health care, prevention, education, and supportive services programs funded by state and federal governments. For more information, visit [www.NASTAD.org](http://www.NASTAD.org).

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